



ASSOCIATION OF
FAMILY AND
CONCILIATION COURTS

Ask the Experts

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Top Ten Things to Consider When Developing a Parenting Plan

FLAFCC Parenting Plans Taskforce

The AFCC Florida Chapter Taskforce on Parenting Plans has looked to current research to provide for the development of empirically advised parenting plans. The Florida Chapter hopes to post more information, including a substantial bibliography, on its web site at FLAFCC.com soon.

1. There is no one size fits all parenting plan

Parenting plans should be constructed to meet the unique needs of each family and each family member.

2. Children's developmental needs must be considered

Children of different ages need and benefit from different parenting arrangements. Parenting plans need to include time-sharing arrangements that reflect children's developmental needs and individual requirements as much as possible. As children get older, these time-sharing arrangements will need to be more flexible.

3. Children grow and families change

A good parenting plan takes into account developmental changes as children grow and life cycle events that will occur in the lives of their parents. Parenting plans should not be static, and should anticipate the need for adjustments to the parenting plan in order to avoid potential conflict when these changes occur.

4. The best parent is two parents

When parents construct their plans, it expresses their acknowledgement that both parents, whenever reasonably possible, are important to their children. Children retain the feeling of family when they have pleasant, free access to both parents and both extended families. The best plan allows ample time for each parent to develop meaningful ongoing relationships with their children.

5. Maximize relationships

The disrupting effect of divorce or parental separation can have profound consequences for children. Children are likely to feel more secure and experience less disruption in their lives when allowed to remain in safe, consistent, supportive, and familiar environments. A good parenting plan encourages the relationships that existed between children and others that were established before the divorce or parental separation.

6. Minimize loss

Children often experience a series of significant losses as a result of their family's changing structure. They may lose their home, familiar schools, access to friends, access to extended family members, regular contact with a pet, and daily access to a parent. Parenting plans that anticipate these changes and minimize losses for their children can be very beneficial.

7. Protect children from conflict

It is well documented that children are harmed when exposed to the conflict between their parents. A good parenting plan builds in structures to avoid children's exposure to parental discord. Some parenting plans may help increase the level of cooperation between parents and other plans may specify the use of an outside party or "intermediary" if parents are unable to resolve their parenting disputes without exposing the children to conflict. Plans can also include that a specific mechanism such as counseling, mediation, and parenting coordination be attempted to resolve issues before parents resort to court action.

8. Protect children's feelings and promote their sense of well being

Children are harmed when they hear one parent say bad things about the other parent. A child's identity is tied to being a product of both parents and their extended families. Parenting plans that build in children's rights to love both parents without fear of reprisal and eliminates blame helps keep children out of loyalty binds and minimizes their feelings of guilt for their parent's separation.

9. Parenting style, gender, and culture makes a difference

Each parent has different and valuable contributions to make to their children's lives. Parenting plans that acknowledge and respect differences in parenting style, the need for gender development for each child, and the importance of maintaining cultural norms helps promote healthy development and a sense of continuity for children.

10. Communications is essential

Communication and cooperation between parents is important. Consistent rules and routines in both households and sharing of knowledge of events create a sense of security for children of all ages. Parenting plans should specify a detailed plan for constructive and effective communication between parents about the children.

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